

Washington, D.C. - According to the Veterans Administration, about one-third of the adult homeless population are veterans, with current population estimates suggesting that about 154,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. Many other veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing. As one critical step to address homelessness among Veterans, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) cosponsored and helped the House pass by a 417-2 margin the Homes for Heroes Act, HR 403. The bill would provide shelter for homeless veterans and their families, and will help prevent low-income families from falling into homelessness.

“We owe a great debt to our Veterans and far too often that debt has not been paid in full,” said Congressman Sestak. “We have done much in recent years to assist our Veterans with the largest ever increase in VA funding and by re-expanding the VA’s healthcare system to more former service members who need access to it. However, we still have unconscionable homeless rates among Veterans partly as a result of past failures, as well as the stress of today’s military operations. This legislation addresses a small part of the responsibility we have to provide Veterans the opportunities they have earned by serving our nation.”

Specifically, this bill establishes a supportive housing program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for low-income veterans. The bill authorizes \$200 million in FY 2008 for an assistance program at HUD for supportive housing and services for low-income veterans. The bill authorizes grants to nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives to expand the supply of permanent housing for low-income veterans and their families and to provide supportive services through such housing to support the needs of such veteran families.

Additionally, this legislation establishes the position of Special Assistant for Veterans Affairs at HUD to coordinate services to homeless veterans and serve as a liaison to the Department of Veterans Affairs, state and local officials, and nonprofit service organizations.

It also establishes a \$200 million assistance program for supportive housing and services for low-income veterans and expands the highly successful HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program, authorizing 20,000 rental vouchers for Veterans annually and making the program permanent.

Furthermore, it authorizes \$1 million in HUD grants to assist housing and service providers with the execution of their housing projects for veterans assisted by HUD, fulfilling the planning and application process, and assisting veterans in obtaining permanent housing or homeless assistance.

Finally, it requires HUD to submit a comprehensive annual report to Congress on the housing needs of homeless veterans and the steps HUD has taken under the programs provided for in the bill.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.

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